

THE INDYPENDENT

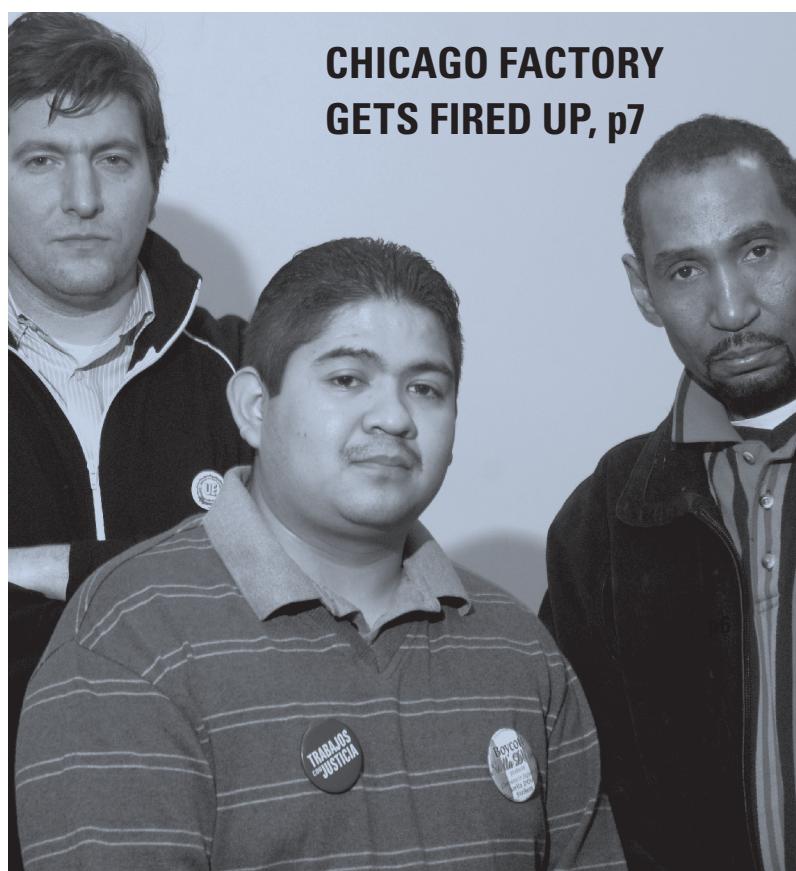
ISSUE #131, FEBRUARY 6 – 26, 2009
A FREE PAPER FOR FREE PEOPLE



Standing Together

JEWISH, MUSLIM AND ARAB-AMERICAN
ACTIVISTS JOIN IN A COMMON CAUSE, p8

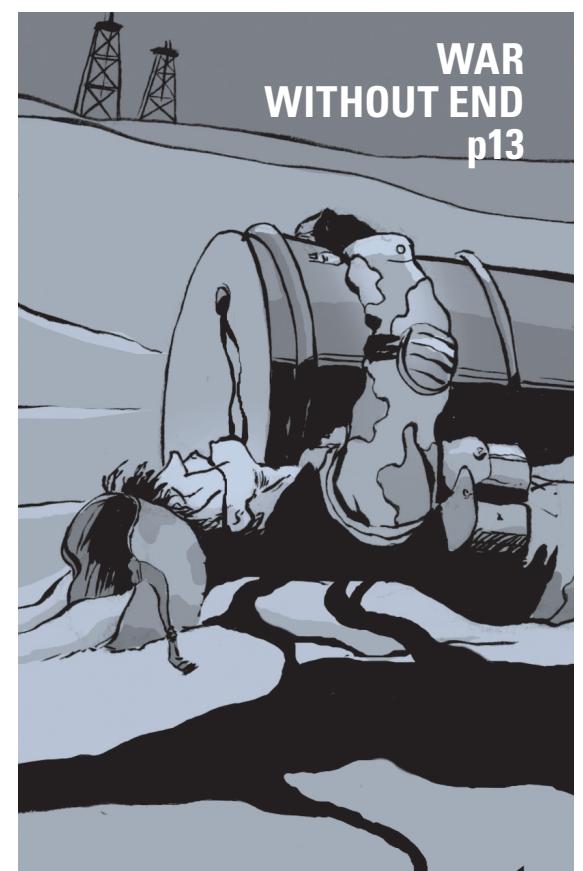
Two protesters share a moment of camaraderie during a Jan. 29 demonstration at Times Square.
PHOTO: JOEL COOK



CHICAGO FACTORY
GETS FIRED UP, p7



BROOKLYN
GROWS
A MOVEMENT
p4



WAR
WITHOUT END
p13



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The Indypendent is a New York-based free newspaper published 17 times a year on Fridays. Since 2000, more than 600 citizen journalists, artists and media activists have contributed their time and energy to this project. Winner of dozens of New York Community Media Alliance awards, *The Indypendent* is dedicated to empowering people to create a true alternative to the corporate press by encouraging citizens to produce their own media. *The Indypendent* is funded by subscriptions, donations, grants, merchandise sales, benefits and advertising from organizations with similar missions. Volunteers write and edit articles, take photographs, do design work and illustrations, help distribute papers, update the website and more! *The Indypendent* reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity.

The Indypendent is the newspaper project of the New York City Independent Media Center, which is affiliated with the global Indymedia movement (indymedia.org), an international network that is dedicated to fostering grassroots media production. NYC IMC sponsors three other projects, the children's newspaper *IndyKids*, the *IndyVideo* news team and the NYC IMC open publishing website (nyc.indymedia.org). NYC IMC relies on volunteer participation and is open to anyone who is interested.

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community calendar

PLEASE SEND EVENT ANNOUNCEMENTS TO INDYEVENTS@GMAIL.COM.
THE NEXT DEADLINE IS FEB. 20.

TUE FEB 10

6pm-8pm • FREE (RSVP Required)
EVENT: CRIME, JUSTICE AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS
Nationwide, states are filling budget gaps by slashing education and human services, yet continue to pour money into incarceration. Will Obama lead the way to a new approach to criminal justice? Join the Correctional Association of New York, the Center for New York City Affairs at The New School and *The Nation* Magazine in exploring New York's approach to criminal justice. Theresa Lang Community & Student Center, 55 W 13th St (btwn 5th & 6th Aves), 2nd Fl. 212-229-5418 • centernyc@newschool.edu

6am-7pm • FREE

EVENT: LOBBY DAY FOR THE DOMESTIC WORKERS' BILL OF RIGHTS
Wake up early and join Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Domestic Workers United and the Coalition for the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights for an early morning bus trip followed by a day in Albany to demand that state legislators pass the Bill of Rights. Barnes & Noble, Union Square (E 17th St & Union Sq East) 212-647-8966 x11 • lane@jfrel.org

THU FEB 12

3:30pm-4:30pm • FREE
WORKSHOP: COMPOSTING FOR KIDS
Bring the little ones to learn the process of decomposition and caring for worms. Kids can make and bring home their own mini-worm-bin. Ages 5+. Registration required. Whole Foods Bowery, 95 E Houston St, upstairs culinary center 212-477-3155 • info@leseologycenter.org

6:30pm-8:30pm • FREE (RSVP Required) DISCUSSION: ARE WE THERE YET?: AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN THE AGE OF OBAMA

In the wake of the inauguration of our nation's first Black president, do we still need to level the playing field for women and racial and ethnic minorities? Alan Jenkins, president of the Opportunity Agenda and John Payton, president of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, will explore the shifting debate on the role of

race in politics and American society. The Rudin Family Forum for Civil Dialogue, Puck Building 295 Lafayette St., 2nd Fl tinyurl.com/d3v6el

6:30pm-7pm • FREE

FILM: UNNATURAL SELECTION
Join SOS Food in viewing a documentary about genetically modified foods. Find out what's going into your body and stick around for the SOS Food meeting to plan to push legislation controlling genetically engineered foods all the way through the State Senate! Sixth Street Community Center 638 E 6th St (btwn Aves B & C) 212-677-1863 • sosfood@earthlink.net

FRI FEB 13

7pm-9pm • FREE (RSVP required)
LECTURE: OBAMA AND OCCUPATION
University of Michigan's Juan Cole talks on "From Gaza to Iraq: Can Obama End the Other Occupation?" Alwan for the Arts, 16 Beaver St, 4th Fl (btwn Broad & Broadway) 646-732-3261 • jamal@alwanforthearts.org

7pm-10pm • \$15+ Suggested Donation BENEFIT: FEEL THE LOVE

A Valentine's Day benefit for the Lesbian Herstory Archives 35th Year Anniversary featuring Twister, a kissing booth, love notes station, silent auction and more! Advance RSVP required. Brooklyn Arts Exchange, 421 5th Ave, Park Slope Lha.valentines.day.2009@gmail.com

SAT FEB 14

7pm (Ride), 8:30pm (After-Party) • FREE (Ride), \$10 (After-Party)
EVENT: LOVE YOUR LANE RIDE AND VALENTINE'S DAY AFTER-PARTY
Join Time's Up! and other bike lovers as they serenade gridlocked drivers down Lover's (Bike) Lane with roses and cheesy love songs. Afterwards, celebrate Cupid at the Time's Up! Fundraiser featuring Team Robespierre and DJ Stache. The party's at The Autumn Bowl — a 2,500-square-foot indoor skate park in Greenpoint — so don't forget to spread the love and come prepared with your bike or skateboard to show off your

FEBRUARY

VALENTINE'S DAY LOVE YOUR LANE RIDE & AFTER-PARTY



at **The Autumn Bowl**,
73 West Street in Greenpoint, Brooklyn

sweet moves. Dress festive!
Ride: Astor Place • Party: The Autumn Bowl, 73 West St, Bklyn
212-802-8222 • times-up.org

10pm • \$10

EVENT: BENEFIT PARTY FOR THE 3rd

ANNUAL NYC ANARCHY FEST

It's never too early to start partying for a good cause! The NYC Anarchy Fest may not kick off until the second weekend of April, but don't you want to help out and get your groove on at the same time? You can't go wrong by beating the late-winter blues with 20,000 watts of techno, fresh fruits and visuals by Low-Key. As always, the radical literature will be flowing freely. Refuge Warehouse, 1532 Decatur St, Bklyn • gabfx4@yahoo.com

FRI FEB 20

8pm • \$10
CONCERT: THE GOOD COFFEEHOUSE
A cappella vocal ensemble Harmonic Insurgence and singer-songwriter Dayna Kurtz. Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture 53 Prospect Park West bsec.org

SAT FEB 21

6:30pm (Dinner at 5:30) • \$3 Donation, \$8.50 for Dinner
EVENT: THE BATTLE TO SAVE PUBLIC EDUCATION – BLACK WOMEN SPEAK OUT!
Budget cuts. School closures. Tuition hikes. Student and teacher activists address how to defend those hit hardest by the current financial crisis and how to build a movement with all members of the community. Sponsored by Radical Women and Freedom Socialist Party. Childcare provided. Freedom Hall, 113 W 128th St (btwn Malcolm X/Lenox & 7th Aves) 212-222-0633 nycradicalwomen@nyct.net

MON FEB 23

7:30pm-9pm (Snacks at 7pm) • FREE after 7:30, \$5 Donation for snacks
STUDY GROUP: ECONOMICS FOR ACTIVISTS
What did Marx mean when he talked about "fictitious capital" and what does it have to do with America's economic meltdown? Does capitalism still work? If you're curious about economics and want to learn about it with a radical analysis, join the Freedom Socialist Party's six-part study group to explore "The Make-Believe World of High Finance." Freedom Hall, 113 W 128th St (btwn Malcolm X/Lenox & 7th Aves) 212-222-0633 • fsp@nyct.net

reader comments

THE REALITY OF "THE DREAM"

Response to "American Dreams: Obama Harnesses the Seductive Appeal of an Abstract Ideology," Jan. 16:

Good article, but I kept waiting and waiting for it to get to the point: That the "American Dream" is bullshit and will never happen for most people under a capitalist system that needs to exploit and accumulate profit, and it must be noted that the "American Dream" is happening on stolen, colonized land. The "Dream" is based on the backs of "third-world" peoples and is being paid for by massive amounts of unsustainable credit as working and middle-class people try to keep up with the "car in the garage, home in the suburbs, flat screen TV" lifestyle without the real wages to pay for it.

—AMILCAR C

POWER FROM BELOW

Response to "Bolivia: A Model for Change," Jan. 16:

One can see a huge difference between Morales and Correa. It seems a lot of that has to do with the power of Bolivian social movements. I also think it is very interesting to note that the Bolivian landless workers movement is opposing the new constitution, saying it doesn't go far enough. That's very good for democracy because even if the constitution passes there will still be pressures from below — the movement won't be co-opted into government like with Venezuela. [Editors Note: See articles on pages 12 and 13]

—JARED

TERMS OF PEACE

Responses to "Top Three Gaza Myths Debunked," Jan. 16:
I think it's insane for Obama

and Israel not to negotiate with Hamas. How are you going to make peace if you won't talk to your enemies? There is a well-known basic framework for what needs to be done in a peace deal, and the only alternatives to peace are endless war or ethnic cleansing.

People need to work for a just and lasting peace: a genuine Palestinian state, safety for Israeli civilians, an agreement on the status of Jerusalem, and a way to settle "right of return." If you're thinking in terms of "pro-Israeli" or "pro-Palestinian," you're thinking in the wrong terms.

—LEFT-WING JEW

In the final analysis, the people of Gaza, Palestine, Israel and the areas around it are ruled by governments who gain more by conflict than by



SPECIAL PULL-OUT POSTER, PAGE 10

nyc.indymedia.org • indydependent.org • us.indymedia.org

peace. They will keep being killed and remain poor until they learn that a war economy is foisted on them by gangsters cloaked as politicians.

—KOHLI SINGH

Continued on page 15

Obama Speaks, Students Sleep

BY MARCUS TURNER

Hours before Barack Obama was sworn in as president of the United States, I waited to pass through a metal detector to get into my own high school in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. It was the usual process: NYPD school security officers robotically commanding me to take my I.D. out, swipe it through the machine, put it back in my wallet, put my wallet in my book bag, take off my boots, and put both into the scanning machine while I walked through the metal detector in my socks. Obama's impending inauguration lent a special air to the day and I thought things might be different — that students at my school would be treated as human beings not criminals. Instead, a blank-faced guard handed me a yellow button to wear that read, "Respect For All By What I Do and Say."

Walking to class, I saw teachers wearing black T-shirts that had the same message as the button. The teachers looked happy and proud. My own first period teacher was not sitting at his desk but relaxing at the back of the classroom with an arm draped over the window sill. He didn't try to start a discussion about who Obama is, what he represents, or how he might make people's lives better. Teachers at our school occasionally enforce discipline and attempt to put misbehaving students in order, but most of the time school has the feeling of chilling on the block. This was one of those days, except the teachers were in a better mood.

"I should have stayed home to watch the inauguration," one classmate said to me. "But I had to come to school because I have a basketball game later."

"I woke up in time," said another, "so I came."

As with any other holiday, both students and teachers conversed about trivial matters. We did not discuss how we feel about Obama's promises, the destruction of Gaza by Israel, if Obama really will leave the Middle East alone, or the question of whether Obama is just another politician who said things to get into office with no intention of actually creating the changes we need. As I looked around me, the ignorance of the teachers was reflected in the low attendance and boredom of the students.

Then, the loudspeaker came on. Sounding like it was coming through a cell phone, Aretha Franklin's anthem "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" was blared into the classroom to reiterate the message on our buttons, although the connection between Obama's inauguration and what it means to be respectful was still unclear. Some students got out of their seats and began to dance around the classroom. Teachers and school administrators ran around with silver and blue balloons, beaming at students, their eyes alight with hope.

Depending on their class schedules, students were organized into different groups to watch the inauguration. My teacher took my class to the music room around 10:15 a.m.

A television was set up on each side of the room. We saw huge crowds of people bundled in their winter coats standing in the cold waving American flags. A few minutes into the class, students began to have side conversations. I fell asleep, but woke up in time to witness Obama being sworn in. As soon as he began his speech, some students resumed sleeping. Others got up and left the room saying, "Yo, I'm outta here." Another student was kindly asked by a teacher to move his seat and make room for others. He responded saying, "Miss, I ain't moving. We got a black president now."

I was stunned and could only think, "Wow, what an idiot" and that if he was thinking this way, then others might think this way too. We must be careful not to think that Obama's "blackness" automatically means that things will be better, just



SHANE-MICHAEL VIDAUERRI

as having a black principal does not guarantee an equal education or fair treatment of students and teachers.

Toward the end of Obama's speech he said, "Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations."

Hearing this, I thought Obama's words resembled those of Martin Luther King, Jr. and sounded like a plea to us to put our complete faith in him the way people once did with Dr. King. As soon as I began to really think about these ideas, a security guard leaned into the room and wagged her finger at us saying, "Get to class." Less than a half-hour later, the principal sent students home for the day by announcing over the loudspeaker, "This is a rapid dismissal, everyone out of the building, fire."

The only thing on fire was my mind, even as it was drowning in the murky waters of miseducation.

"Marcus Turner" is a pseudonym.



READY ON DAY ONE: An Ecuadorian immigrant speaks at a Jan. 21 rally outside the Federal Building in Lower Manhattan. Similar immigrant rights demonstrations were held in more than a half-dozen cities on President Barack Obama's first day in office. The protesters urged Obama to help keep immigrant families intact by issuing an administrative order that would stop all raids and deportations. PHOTO: EDUARDO SANCHEZ

Crossing the Hyphen

BY NICHOLAS POWERS

A friend and I dashed through empty streets to the Mall in Washington, D.C. Only three minutes were left before Barack Obama's inauguration began. "Let's not run," I said. "Let's pop in here get some coffee." The warm store fogged my glasses and while wiping them I heard Obama. "I stand here today humbled..." Rhythmic, ascending Obama's speech quieted the shop.

The cook, a tall work-weary man stared at the radio. More than listening, he was laying the weight of his life on this voice. Two women at the counter hummed "yes." The cook did not blink, as if Obama's words were a bridge over an abyss. The door rang as people came in. Cold air blew on our cheeks while the new visitors quieted and circled the radio. We were strangers but floated within his promise that "old hatreds shall someday pass; that the lines of tribe shall soon dissolve." Obama rose to his last peak. "We carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations." He ended and our shoulders lowered. I looked at the faces around me and saw hope and behind it love.

Through the night D.C. buzzed. Men in tuxes and women in flowing gowns paraded through the icy wind. On the bus home we laughed, yelled. One man strutted with a t-shirt, "I Got My Country Back." we were joyous because Obama's victory ended a separation that was older than this election.

Many of us grew up in the era of identity politics. One could be African-American, Latino-America, Indian-American on and on but never simply American. Always the hyphen was there like a drawbridge we couldn't cross. Stranded in-between our family's origin and our own destinations, we looked at those safely inside and wanted to be shielded by the same walls. The criticism we aimed at America felt like it came not from solidarity with the suffering but resentment at being refused. We secretly wanted an end to identity politics because life on the hyphen means you cannot be on either side.

With Obama's inauguration, we crossed that hyphen. We could because Obama siphoned our homesickness, long buried under rage and forged it into words that like a key opened door after door until he sat in the Oval Office. Now we are inside with him. Watching, hoping but hearing from the Left that we're trapped in an ideological delusion that conceals the reality of a ruined world. It's a classic Marxist critique. And while there are reasons to be suspicious of Obama's politics, friends testify of deep transformation.

One told me she began writing songs after a long struggle with silence. My boss told me of a student who dropped out years ago, called on Inauguration Day to say he wanted to return and finish his degree. "Does Obama being sworn in have anything to do with it?" He asked. The student said, "It has everything to do with it." More than anything else Obama gave our elders, who marched in the Civil Rights Movement, who protested in the '60s, a gift in the last part of their lives. He made their sacrifices meaningful. Even if his policies stay moderate for that alone we are grateful.

The reason for this is an often missed fact that is more than symbolic. The White House was built by slaves. The United States was built by our parents and grandparents. They worked their whole lives for a nation their children were separated from by a hyphen. With Obama we claimed our inheritance. And this is why we love him. He allowed us to come home.

LOCAL

A Selection of Brooklyn Food Conference Partner Organizations:

Brooklyn Farmhouse
brooklynfarmhouse.com

Community Bookstore
communitybookstore.net

Rolling Press
rollingpress.com

The Cobble Hill Green Thumb Community-Supported Agriculture
cobblehillcsa.org

House of the Lord Church
holc.org

Silencematters Blog
silencematters.com

What I Made for Dinner Blog
whatimadefordinner.blogspot.com

Green Edge Collaborative NYC
greenedge.ning.com

Park Slope Food Coop
foodcoop.com

Added Value
added-value.org

BedStuy Campaign Against Hunger
bedstuyagainsthunger.org

Brooklyn Rescue Mission
brooklynrescuemission.org

Camba
camba.org

Center for the Urban Environment
thecue.org

Corporate Accountability International
stopcorporateabuse.org

East New York Farms
eastnewyorkfarms.org

Food and Water Watch
foodandwaterwatch.org

Friends and Residents of the Greater Gowanus (Frogg)
frogg.us

Grassroots Netroots Alliance
grassrootsnetroots.org

Just Food
justfood.org

New York City Coalition Against Hunger
nyccah.org

New York Permaculture Exchange
permaculture-exchange.org

Transportation Alternatives
transalt.org

Weeksville Heritage Center
weeksvillesociety.org

World Hunger Year
worldhungeryear.org

Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY)
rocny.org

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1500
ufcw1500.org

Brandworkers International
brandworkers.org

For a complete list, visit brooklynfoodconference.org.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: Park Slope Food Coop member Nancy Romer is helping organize a Brooklyn-based food democracy movement. PHOTO: THOMAS MARCZEWSKI

A Taste for Change

BY ARON GUY

In many areas of Brooklyn, you can get a cheeseburger at 2 a.m. but you have to get on a bus to buy a head of lettuce. For Park Slope resident Nancy Romer, this is not acceptable.

"There are huge swaths of people who have no access to healthy food living right here in Brooklyn," said Romer, who is a long-time member of the Park Slope Food Coop and the general coordinator of the upcoming Brooklyn Food Conference.

Many local organizations are already working hard to provide Brooklyn communities access to healthy food. A new group, the Brooklyn Food Coalition, is bringing businesses and organizations together to create a network devoted to increasing food democracy — access for all people to sustainable, healthy and delicious food produced under non-exploitative conditions. To celebrate the birth of this new coalition, the first ever Brooklyn Food Conference will be held May 2.

"The conference is organized to provide entry points at many levels," Romer said. "People interested in cooking, the political economy of food, climate change, obesity, what to feed their kids, all of that, will be there. And then there will be a lot of fun."

"Food is an issue that is so familiar to people," Romer added. "It's not an abstract idea."

The idea to organize a Brooklyn Food Conference began with members of the Park Slope Food Coop. Founded in 1973 as an alternative to commercial supermarkets, the coop is about connecting people to local, fresh and healthier food, rather than making a profit. In exchange for low prices, coop members agree to volunteer three hours a month, often on committees that help educate fellow members and the neighborhood about food issues. Members within the coop's Safe Food Committee came up with the idea of the

Brooklyn Food Conference.

"The Safe Food Committee had a narrow mission at first, to educate members about genetically modified foods," said Adam Rabiner, a Safe Food Committee member who will be a moderator at the May 2 conference.

At their committee meetings, it became clear that members had many areas of food expertise. Rabiner said that the committee's shared knowledge encouraged them to expand their efforts.

"We wanted to have a greater impact," Rabiner said. So the group began to brainstorm about how to expand their audience and educate people about what can be done to address the broken global food system. Out of this effort, the idea for a day of education, networking and celebration took hold.

Although the idea originated within the Park Slope Food Coop, a network has quickly grown. So far, more than 60 organizations plan to participate in the conference, which is being co-sponsored by Brooklyn's Bounty and the Caribbean Women's Health Association, Inc. (CWHA), a non-profit health, immigration and social services organization.

"For 25 years, the Caribbean Women's Health Association has been trying to improve the health of the Caribbean community, and food is a part of health," said Cheryl Hall, CWHA executive director. "Nancy [Romer] had approached us about partnering and we said yes, and then when we sat down and started talking about the goals of the conference, we decided to go ahead and become a co-sponsor." Representatives from the Caribbean Women's Health Association will be leading workshops in nutrition and other topics.

"Just like biodiversity makes for greater productivity in crops, so does organizational diversity in movements," Romer said. "What I mean is not just race, gender, class, ethnicity, though that too, but the wide

range of organizations in the food democracy movement — food banks, food pantries, kids programming, school lunch activists, farmers markets, food coops, unions, all those different organizations vary tremendously. I think that grassroot infrastructure of diversity gives this food democracy movement a lot of power."

Several labor unions, workers' rights organizations and restaurants have joined the Brooklyn Food Conference as partners, including Brandworkers International.

"We want to help build a sustainable food movement that incorporates respect for workers' human rights," said Brandworkers International Director Daniel Gross at a Jan. 30 conference benefit. Founded in March 2008, Brandworkers has a mission of empowering retail and food employees to improve working conditions throughout the supply chain.

Gross explained how the first wave of the healthy food movement focused more on consumers, in particular white, wealthier communities. However, Gross said that the food movement is increasingly being embraced by working-class communities and feels that the Brooklyn Food Conference is a "repudiation" of the common perception of a food movement only for the privileged.

"Workers are not an afterthought in the food democracy movement, but a key component," Gross said.

"We want to create a long-term coalition between people interested in health, in sustainability and in social justice," Romer said. "By social justice, we're talking about access to healthy food for all people, regardless of income or location, and for food workers — in agriculture, processing, retail, restaurants, to have a living wage and decent working conditions. If you raise the wages of the people working in food, you've made a real dent in poverty."

"We're challenging agribusiness and big food," Romer said. "You can't change the system unless you change those."

Brooklyn Food Conference organizers plan to spend the next few months getting as many people on board as possible in order to make May 2 not a one-day festival, but rather the beginning of a long, organized campaign for a Brooklyn-based food democracy movement.

"We don't want it to be over May 2," said Kathie Borowitz, secretary of the Safe Food Committee and one of the main organizers. "We want to encourage people to act, but beyond that, we want the May 2 event to establish a Brooklyn base for the International Food Movement."

Romer said many people were inspired by their work on the Obama campaign, but knows that his election was only the beginning. "If we don't push him, we know we're going to get a lackluster presidency. ... There's a lot of room for push, and we have to be the ones to push."

The Brooklyn Food Conference will take place May 2 from 9am-9pm at PS 321 & John Jay High School on 7th Avenue, Park Slope, Brooklyn.

FOOD CONFERENCE DRAWS BIG NAMES

The Brooklyn Food Conference will be a medley of lectures and workshops from local organizations, businesses and well-known activists that aims to bring people together to build a Brooklyn-based movement to promote food democracy, social justice and environmental sustainability. Here are a few presenters you won't want to miss:

DAN BARBER is executive chef and co-owner of Blue Hill Restaurant in New York City and Blue Hill Restaurant at Stone Barns. A leader of healthy restauranteurs and advocate for farming issues, Barber bases his cooking on a philosophy of using sustainably grown, local ingredients.



ANNA LAPPÉ is a Brooklynite and a founding principal of Small Planet Institute, an education and media organization for "living democracy."

Along with her mother, *Diet for a Small Planet* author Frances Moore Lappé, she wrote *Grub: Ideas for an Urban Organic Kitchen* and *Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet*.

LADONNA REDMOND is founder and executive director of Chicago's Institute for Community Resource Development, dedicated to rebuilding the local food system in Chicago by building grocery stores with access to sustain-



able products for urban communities of color, organizing farmers markets, converting vacant lots to urban farm sites and distributing locally grown produce to restaurants.

RAJ PATEL is the author of *Stuffed and Starved: The Hidden Battle for the World Food System*, an exposé of the global food system and how activists are gaining ground against its corporate control.



He is a researcher at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and a fellow with Food First, a leading food think-tank.

CHERYL HALL is acting executive Director of the Caribbean Women's Health Association. She has been a community leader in providing excellent, culturally respectful and broadly available health care for residents of Brooklyn and Queens.

Online registration begins Feb. 15. brooklynfoodconference.org.

—JESSICA LEE



REFUSING TO CRUMBLE: Striking workers of the Stella D'oro Biscuit Co. factory march in the Bronx, Jan. 31. The company's owners are demanding that workers take a 28 percent pay cut and a substantial deduction in benefits. PHOTOS: SARAH SECUNDA

'No Contract, No Cookies!'

BY SARAH SECUNDA

On a bright and bitterly cold Saturday morning, several hundred protesters gathered outside the Stella D'oro Biscuit Co. factory in the Bronx Jan. 31 to call for a boycott of the company's famous cookies and biscuits.

"No contract, no cookies!" the crowd chanted as people marched from the factory, located 84 West 237th Street, down Broadway to a rally site located near the Target Shopping Center at 225th Street and Major Deegan Expressway.

The 136 workers of Stella D'oro, members of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers, and Grain Millers (BCTGM) International Union Local 50, have now been on strike since Aug. 13, when the company's management walked out on contract negotiations.

Management so far has refused to alter the company's proposed contract, which calls for workers to take a 28 percent pay cut over the next five years. The proposed contract, among other concessions, would also eliminate sick pay, four holidays and one week of vacation.

In a Dec. 18 letter to strikers, the company warned that it already had filled about half of the union members' positions with scabs.

Sarah Rodriguez, a Stella D'oro employee of 11 years, characterized the situation as a waiting-game.

"They want to get rid of the union," she said, referring to the company's owners, the private equity firm Brynwood Partners.

With their unemployment benefits set to run out in May, the strikers in recent weeks have ramped up their efforts to draw attention to their cause, holding rallies and calling press conferences.

Jerry Fleck, who has worked at Stella D'oro for 27 years, described the Jan. 31 rally as the largest demonstration yet.

"Hopefully it will wake [management] up," Fleck said. "They thought we were going to cave in already. They thought somebody was going to cross the line. But they got to know that this is a community."

BEYOND the BALLOT:

Making the Movement Matter



Join Amy Goodman, host of Democracy Now! and writers, Frances Fox Piven and Christian Parenti, at a conference on movement building under Barack Obama.

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 28TH, 2009

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Brutality at Angola Prison

PRESIDENT OBAMA PROMISES TO CLOSE GUANTÁNAMO AND END TORTURE, BUT A COURT PROCEEDING IN LOUISIANA EXPOSES PROBLEMS CLOSER TO HOME

BY JORDAN FLAHERTY

The torture of prisoners in U.S. custody is not only found in military prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantánamo. If President Barack Obama is serious about ending U.S. support for torture, he can start here in Louisiana.

The Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola is already notorious for a range of offenses, including keeping former Black Panthers Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox, in solitary for more than 36 years.

Now a death penalty trial in St. Francisville, La., has exposed widespread and systemic abuse at the prison. Even in the context of eight years of the Bush administration, the behavior documented at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola stands out both for its brutality and for the significant evidence that it was condoned and encouraged from the very top of the chain of command.

In a remarkable hearing that explored torture practices at Angola, 25 inmates testified last summer to facing overwhelming violence in the aftermath of an escape attempt at the prison nearly a decade ago. These 25 inmates — who were not involved in the escape attempt, but were in the same building — testified to being kicked, punched, beaten with batons and with fists, stepped on, left naked in a freezing cell and threatened that they would be killed. They were threatened by guards that they would be sexually assaulted with batons. They were forced to urinate and defecate on themselves. They were bloodied, had teeth knocked out, were beaten until they lost control of bodily functions, and abused until they signed statements or confessions presented to them by prison officials. One inmate had a broken jaw, and another was placed in solitary confinement for eight years.

While prison officials deny the policy of abuse, the range of prisoners who gave statements, in addition to medical records and other evidence introduced at the trial, present a powerful argument that abuse is a standard policy at the prison. Several of the prisoners received \$7,000 when the state agreed to settle — without admitting liability — two civil rights lawsuits filed by 13 inmates. They will have to spend that money behind bars — more than 90 percent of Angola's prisoners are expected to die behind its walls.

SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE

During the attempted escape at Angola, in which one guard was killed and two were taken hostage, a team of officers — including Angola warden Burl Cain — rushed in and began shooting, killing one inmate, Joel Durham, and wounding another, David Mathis.

The prison has no official guidelines for what should happen during escape attempts or other crises, a policy that seems designed to encourage the violent treatment documented in this case. Richard Stalder, at that time the secretary of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, was also at the prison at the time. Yet despite — or because of — the presence of the prison warden and head of corrections for the state, guards were given free hand to engage in violent retribution. Cain later told a reporter after the shooting that Angola's policy was

not to negotiate, saying, "That's a message all the inmates know. They just forgot it. And now they know it again."

Five prisoners — including Mathis — were charged with murder, and currently are on trial, facing the death penalty — partially based on testimony from other inmates that was obtained through beatings and torture. The St. Francisville hearing was requested by Mathis' defense counsel to demonstrate that, in the climate of violence and abuse, inmates were forced to sign statements through torture, and therefore those statements should be inadmissible.

The behavior documented in the hearing not only raises strong doubts about the cases against the prisoners, known as the Angola Five, but it also shows a pattern of systemic abuse so open and regular, it defies the traditional excuse of bad apples. Inmate Doyle Billiot testified to being threatened with death by the guards, "What's not to be afraid of? Got all these security guards coming around you everyday looking at you sideways, crazy and stuff. Don't know what's on their mind, especially when they threaten to kill you." Another inmate, Robert Carley testified that a false confession was beaten out of him. "I was afraid," he said. "I felt that if I didn't go in there and tell them something, I would die."

Inmate Kenneth "Geronimo" Edwards testified that the guards "beat us half to

death." He also testified that guards threatened to sexually assault him with a baton, saying, "That's a big black ... say you want it." Later, Edwards says, the guards, "put me in my cell. They took all my clothes. Took my jumpsuit. Took all the sheets, everything out the cell, and put me in the cell buck-naked ... It was cold in the cell. They opened the windows and turned the blowers on." At least a dozen other inmates also testified to receiving the same beatings, assault, threats of sexual violence, and "freezing treatment."

Some guards at the prison treated the abuse as a game. Inmate Brian Johns testified at the hearing that, "One of the guards was hitting us all in the head. Said he liked the sound of the drums — the drumming sound that — from hitting us in the head with the stick."

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Two of Angola's most famous residents, political prisoners Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox, have become the primary example of another form of abuse common at Angola — the use of solitary confinement as punishment for political views. The two have now each spent more than 36 years in solitary, despite the fact that a judge recently overturned Woodfox's conviction — prison authorities continue to hold Woodfox and have announced plans to retry him. Woodfox and Wallace — who together with former pris-

oner King Wilkerson are known as the Angola Three — have filed a civil suit against Angola, arguing that their confinement has violated both their Eighth Amendment rights against cruel and unusual punishment and Fourth Amendment right to due process.

Recent statements by Angola Warden Burl Cain makes clear that Woodfox and Wallace are being punished for their political views. At a recent deposition, attorneys for Woodfox asked Cain, "Lets just for the sake of argument assume, if you can, that he is not guilty of the murder of Brent Miller." Cain responded, "Okay. I would still keep him in (solitary) ... I still know that he is still trying to practice Black Pantherism, and I still would not want him walking around my prison because he would organize the young new inmates. I would have me all kind of problems, more than I could stand, and I would have the blacks chasing after them ... He has to stay in a cell while he's at Angola."

Louisiana Attorney General James "Buddy" Caldwell has said the case against the Angola Three is "personal" to him. The testimony presented at the Angola Five trial indicates that this vigilante attitude pervades New Orleans' criminal justice system, and Caldwell and Cain's comments show that the problem comes from the very top.

The problem is not limited to Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola — similar stories can be found in prisons across the United States. But from the abandonment of prisoners in Orleans Parish Prison during Hurricane Katrina to the case of the Jena Six, Louisiana's criminal justice system, which has the highest incarceration rate in the world, often seems to be functioning under plantation-style justice.

Once we say that abuse or torture is an acceptable practice to use against prisoners, the next step is for it to be used in the wider population. A recent petition for administrative remedies filed by Herman Wallace states, "If Guantánamo Bay has been a national embarrassment and symbol of the U.S. government's relation to charges, trials and torture, then what is being done to the Angola 3 ... is what we are to expect if we fail to act quickly ... The government tries out its torture techniques on prisoners in the U.S. — just far enough to see how society will react. It doesn't take long before they unleash their techniques on society as a whole." If we don't stand up against this abuse now, it will only spread.

Despite the hearings, civil suits and other documentation, the guards who performed the acts documented in the hearing on torture at Angola remain unpunished, and the system that empowered them remains in place. In fact, many of the guards have been promoted, and remain in supervisory capacity over the same inmates they were documented to have beaten mercilessly. Warden Burl Cain still oversees Angola. Meanwhile, the trial of the Angola Five is moving forward, and those with the power to change the pattern of abuse at Angola remain silent.

Jordan Flaherty is a journalist based in New Orleans. This article was originally published at southernstudies.org. Research assistance for this article was provided by Emily Ratner.



LYNNE FOSTER

Shut Down in Chi-Town

“ORGANIZED LABOR WILL HAVE TO TAKE SOME MEASURE OF RISK,” SAYS MARK MEINSTER.

BY BENJAMIN DANGL

Within days of being fired, more than 200 workers at the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago took action. With support from several labor unions, the workers occupied their plant Dec. 5, 2008, demanding that they be paid owed vacation and severance checks.

The occupation ended victoriously six days later when Bank of America and other lenders to Republic agreed to pay the workers the approximately \$2 million owed to them.

But the workers did not stop there. They are now seeking ways to restart the factory — which manufactures heating efficient windows and doors — and potentially operate it as a worker-run cooperative. The workers are also filing charges against Republic for failing to give them sufficient notice of plans to shut the factory down; the workers were only given three days’ notice and the management refused to negotiate with the workers’ union about the closure.

The United Electrical Workers (UE) — the union the Republic workers belong to — announced Jan. 14 that California-based Serious Materials, a highly successful company in the green, heating-efficient window market, will likely buy the Republic and Windows and Doors’ assets, thus putting the workers back to work.

“We are all hopeful about the possibility of Serious reopening our plant. This would be a very happy ending to our struggle,” said former Republic worker and Local 1110 Vice President Melvin Maclin in a Jan. 14 press release.

In this interview, UE International Representative Mark Meinster talks about his role as the coordinator for the plant occupation, connections between the struggle of the Republic workers and workers’ campaigns and tactics in South America, the fight to re-open the factory, and how what happened at the small Chicago factory may have set a tone for the role of social change in an economic downturn.

BENJAMIN DANGL: Please briefly describe your role in the union, in the occupation of the Republic Windows and Doors factory, and the ongoing struggle of the Republic workers.

MARK MEINSTER: I’m an International Representative for the United Electrical Workers (UE). My primary responsibility is to oversee the union’s organizing work and staff in Chicago, Ill., and Milwaukee, Wis. I was the lead organizer on the effort to organize the



NO WAY: Republic Window and Door workers received widespread support during their Dec. 5–10 occupation of their closed factory in Chicago. PHOTO: CHRIS GEOVANIS



GOING STRONG: Participants in the December takeover of the Republic Windows and Doors factory in Chicago joined New York City labor organizers Jan. 31 at Judson Memorial Church to share ideas about how to create a more militant labor movement. From left to right: Mark Meinster (see interview), Raul Flores and Melvin “Ricky” Maclin. PHOTO: MARK BAILEY

Republic workers into UE in 2004 and led negotiations for a first contract in 2005. Since then, I and UE Field Organizer Leah Fried, have worked with the local [union] on leadership and steward training, grievance handling and contract negotiations. I coordinated the plant occupation at Republic Windows and Doors and participated in negotiations with the employer and the financial institutions involved and continue to work on efforts to reopen the plant.

BD: Could you please talk about some of the connections you see between the Republic workers’ struggle and actions and the strategies and experiences of similar workers groups in Argentina and Venezuela and the landless farmers in Brazil? How did you learn about these struggles and come to apply them in Chicago as a union organizer?

MM: Obviously there is a long history of workers taking actions of this type, both within the U.S. and in other countries. Because there have been very few plant occupations in the U.S. since the 1930s, we needed to look to workers’ struggles in other countries for recent guidance. For example, the Canadian Auto Workers, who have engaged in similar actions over the past twenty years to protest plant closings and win severance benefits, provided us with invaluable technical advice.

But in many respects, workers’ struggles in Latin America were the biggest inspiration for the Republic occupation. I had read about the land occupations carried out by the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in an interview with Joao Pedro Stedile in 2002. I was struck by the MST’s focus on popular education and leadership development, and especially the way they placed the occupation tactic within the context of the right to unused land enshrined in the Brazilian constitution. The occupation, although technically an illegal tactic, was used to enforce a legal right. This gives workers confidence and places the struggle on a moral plane, allowing for more significant community and political support. We drew on this concept in plan-

ning the Republic occupation.

Current UE Local 1110 President Armando Robles attended the World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela, in 2006. There he heard from workers from Inveval, a “recovered” factory in Venezuela. They had inspired a movement of workers occupying and running factories, with the help of the government that had been abandoned by bosses who had fled the country. Armando returned from that experience politicized and inspired. I visited Venezuela in 2007 and spent time visiting worker-run co-ops. I was struck by the workers’ investment in the revolutionary process and their ability to run production without management.

We drew on the Argentine factory occupations to the extent that they show that during an economic crisis, workers’ movements are afforded a wider array of tactical options. Militant action can win public support during a downturn in ways that would have been impossible before. In fact, the film *The Take* was screened in the factory during the occupation in a makeshift movie theater set up in the locker room.

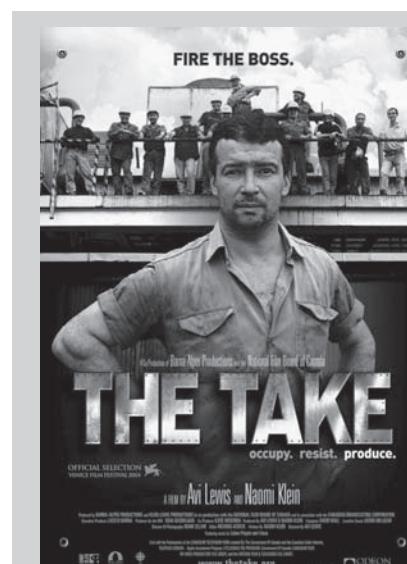
BD: Is there a plan to transform the Republic factory into a worker-run cooperative? If so, how did the decision to do this come about? At this point, how is the process going of setting this up?

MM: At this point we are working to find a buyer for the factory, focusing on firms specializing in energy efficient windows. Though we are also exploring the idea of a cooperative enterprise, the fact that no real movement of worker-run enterprises exists in the U.S. makes this option much more difficult at this point. The workers have set up an entity, called the “Windows of Opportunity Fund,” to help provide technical assistance and to study this and other possibilities for re-starting production.

BD: Could you comment on the role the Republic workers’ struggle in inspiring workers across the United States to take up similar tactics to confront unemployment and problems related to the current U.S. economic downturn?

MM: I think the Republic struggle shows we can win support for bold tactics, especially when we think carefully about how we project the struggle to the public. Time will tell whether the Republic struggle will be viewed as a bell-weather event or a flash in the pan. On the one hand, the occupation led to a huge outpouring of support — from solidarity rallies all across the country to donations of money, food and essential supplies. That this support was on a scale unthinkable only a year ago is proof that this action spoke to the desire of working class people to seek ways to resist the current economic onslaught. On the other hand, for this event to be a spark, others will have to pick up the baton. That means organized labor will have to take some measure of risk, embracing militant tactics when necessary and abandoning its reliance on political maneuvering as the primary means for the advancement of a working class agenda.

Benjamin Dangl is the author of *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia* (AK Press). He is the editor of *TowardFreedom.com*, a progressive perspective on world events, and *UpsideDownWorld.org*, a website on activism and politics in Latin America.



TAKING ON THE SYSTEM

In the shadow of economic collapse in Argentina in 2001, workers took action to fire up factories that had shut down when the bosses and capital investment split overnight. Filmmakers and authors Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein captured the moment 30 unemployed auto-parts workers took back their factory. In a personal clash of capitalism versus collectivism, the documentary *The Take* tells the story of what can happen when workers refuse to be victims of the system. Underneath an economic system that favors profits over people, a social justice movement continues to grow.

For more information:
thetake.org • theworkingworld.org

GAZA STIRS THE GRASSROOTS

Israel's assault on Gaza sparked a wave of protests. Now, Jewish, Muslim and Arab-American activists are taking aim at the U.S. government's support of its favorite client state.

Embattled Communities Find Their Voice

BY ZAHRA HANKIR

Linda Sarsour, a Palestinian born and raised in Brooklyn, tirelessly helped put together several rallies in New York City after Israel launched its 22-day offensive on Gaza. As a Bay Ridge community organizer and head of the Arab American Association of New York, she spoke to imams at local mosques, translated and distributed fliers at high schools and used Facebook to attract as many spectators as possible.

"We [the Arab-American and Muslim communities] have been the underdog for so long," said Sarsour, 28, "so we organized these protests around our emotions. We saw anger, rage and sadness. It was almost like those were our families back there."

The resolve was well worth it. Arab-American and Muslim communities of New York and various grassroots movements united in their call for an end to the atrocities. Thousands demanded that the United States stop funding the Jewish state during two massive protests at Times Square. The opening verse of the Qur'an was recited at one, and spectators could be seen praying in the midst of the crowds. Hundreds also



EYES ON THE PRIZE: Linda Sarsour of Bay Ridge tirelessly organized pro-Palestinian demonstrations in New York City during Israel's invasion of Gaza. PHOTO: MAJED SEIF

turned out at City Hall to denounce Mayor Michael Bloomberg for visiting Israel during the fighting and ignoring Gaza.

Although Sarsour had helped mobilize the communities on other occasions, she said that the Gaza protests had a distinct energy. New York City saw the largest number of pro-Palestine protests across the nation. And of the rallies organized during the past seven years — against the Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon wars — those in support of Gaza were the most critical of U.S. foreign policy.

Over 280 pro-Palestine protests in some 117 cities across the United States have symbolized a shift in the activism of the Arab-American and Muslim communities. Despite this mobilization, these communities still lack an organization whose primary mission is the systematic articulation of demands on the national level. Nonetheless, efforts to mobilize on the local level continue, and younger activists as well as artists, grassroots organizations and publications focusing on Arab-American issues have emerged.

OVERCOMING POST-9/11 FEARS

For Dr. Rashid Khalidi, professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University, the recent surge in protests "represents a higher level of activity [than] in the past. It may be that these demonstrations all over the country represent a new beginning."

The previous lack of activism is largely attributed to the post-9/11 era, during which a chill fell over the activities of the communities. "The atmosphere was much more hostile, much more menacing," Dr. Khalidi told *The Independent* during a phone interview.

There are roughly 600,000 Muslims in New York, and according to the Arab American Institute, some 405,000 Arab-Americans. Arabs and Muslims are concentrated in the neighborhoods of Bay Ridge, Bensonhurst, Astoria, Jamaica and Atlantic Avenue.

A 2006 U.S. Department of Justice report found that Arab-Americans feared racial profiling and forced emigration, were suspicious of the government and law enforcement and were concerned about civil liberties.

"Many Arab-Americans undoubtedly, and correctly, concerned for their economic and

let the injured get medical care by impeding and firing on ambulances. A coalition of nine Israeli human rights groups called for an investigation into whether Israel committed war crimes, protesting the "wanton use of lethal force" against Palestinian civilians.

Gaza is the most crowded place on earth; it holds 1.5 million people, half of whom are children under 15. The majority of Gazans are the descendants of Palestinians who were forced to flee during the founding of Israel in 1948. Eighty percent of Gazans subsist on less than \$2 a day and depend on the United Nations for basic survival. Israel has imposed a 19-month-long blockade, stopping food, fuel and medical supplies from reaching Gaza despite U.N. pleas that the restrictions be lifted.

Seven weeks later, Israel launched a massive military offensive into Gaza that shocked much of the world while gaining widespread support inside the Jewish state.

The Gaza offensive took 13 Israeli lives, including three civilians. Meanwhile more than 1,300 Palestinian lives were lost, more than half of which were civilians, including at least 400 children. At least 5,000 were injured. The price tag for the reconstruction of

social welfare, stepped back from active involvement or identification with Arab-American or Arab issues," said Dr. Janice Terry, professor of the Modern Middle East at the Eastern University of Michigan.

The USA PATRIOT Act, persistent stereotypes propagated by the mainstream media, George W. Bush's "War on Terror," and special registration that required tens of thousands of immigrants to be questioned and fingerprinted deepened a growing fear among many of the nation's 3.5 million Arab-Americans.

THE OBAMA FACTOR

But the situation has since thawed as far as citizens are concerned, Khalidi said. The shift, he argued, might be attributed to sentiments around the election of President Barack Obama. "Attacks against Obama for being a Muslim and for palling around with Palestinian terrorists ... did not succeed," he said.

Small gestures from Obama, including the use of his middle name Hussein in the inauguration ceremony, his granting his first one-on-one interview as president to Al-Arabiya TV and his appointment of former Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, an Arab-American, as special envoy to the Middle East, have raised hopes that the new administration is willing to take a more open and inclusive approach to working with Muslims and the Arab world. Still, says Dr. Terry, "those closest to Obama in the White House represent the old approach of exclusion of Arab-Americans in political decisions." In addition, the absence of a single all-encompassing political lobby similar to the American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC) puts the community at a disadvantage on the national level, and hence it cannot directly affect policy or debate, Terry argued.

However, there has been a rise in the political awareness of the younger generation, some say. "They see what's happening, and they will not accept it. This generation is educated in America's political system and they are following [Arab] media. They have hope in the new President. They want to pressure New York's administration to change," said Ayman el-Fawa, a member of the Palestinian

Continued on page 10

Gaza's Facts on the Ground

BY JAISAL NOOR

Amnesty International released a report Nov. 5 stating that a five-and-a-half-month ceasefire between Israel and Hamas "has brought enormous improvements in the quality of life in Sderot and other Israeli villages near Gaza." However, it warned that a spate of Israeli and Palestinian attacks and counter-attacks in the previous 24 hours could "once again put the civilian populations of Gaza and southern Israel in the line of fire."

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roads, schools, synagogues, yeshivas and even police stations) has been carried out on private lands belonging to Palestinian West Bank residents."

It has been reported that President Barack Obama may start indirect low-level talks with Hamas, similar to those that the Carter administration held with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the late 1970s. In 1982, Israel responded to the PLO's willingness to negotiate by invading Lebanon, where the PLO was based, in a war that killed as many as 25,000 people. Twenty-seven years later the PLO's Fatah party has been reduced to the role of collaborating in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and in spite of 16 years of negotiations it has been unable to stop Israeli expansion onto Palestinian lands.

It has been argued that the objective of Israel's assault on Gaza was to knock out



STANDING UP (AND SITTING DOWN) FOR PALESTINE: (Above) A Palestinian supporter speaks out at a rally in Bryant Park Dec. 29. PHOTO: JOEL COOK (Below) Anti-Zionist activists blockade the entrance to the Marriott Marquis Hotel at 47th and Broadway in Manhattan. They were protesting a \$1,500-per-plate fundraising dinner for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the nation's most powerful pro-Israel lobbying organization. Ten people were arrested during the action. PHOTO: VANESSA CHAN



Jewish Rebels Rally Against Zionism

BY ALEX KANE

Judy Rebick has received death threats, been screamed at, and been labeled a "self-hating Jew" for her outspokenness on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

But that hasn't stopped her participation in any of the many Jewish-led and supported actions during Israel's latest incursion into the impoverished Gaza Strip in Palestine.

"For people who embrace a progressive Jewish vision, Israel is against everything we believe in," Rebick said. "They're violating the Jewish tradition of progressive struggle, and their claim of being a victim is wrong."

Rebick, a professor of labor studies at Ryerson University who founded rabble.ca, a progressive Canadian news website, was arrested along with seven other Jewish women after they occupied the Israeli consulate in Toronto Jan. 8 in an action against the Israeli bombing and invasion of the Gaza Strip, which killed more than 1,300 Palestinians and wounded at least 5,000.

Jewish peace activists in Montreal, San Francisco and Los Angeles have staged similar demonstrations at Israeli Consulates, highlighting the many Jewish voices around the world that are speaking out against continued occupation and war in Palestine in what is often a bitter and polarizing debate.

In New York City, Jews Against the Occupation-NYC (JATO) dropped antiwar banners near the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway and near the U.S.S. *Intrepid*, and another group of New York City Jews hastily organized a demonstration outside the Israeli consulate in New York Jan. 12. On Jan. 29, 10 anti-Zionist activists, two of them Jewish and most of them college students, were arrested while trying to blockade the entrance to a Midtown hotel that was the site of a \$1,500-per-plate benefit for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the nation's leading pro-Israel lobbying group.

"[Israel] is the state that purports to be our homeland, and whether we feel that it is or not ... its actions somehow reflect on Jews in general," said Alisa Solomon, co-editor of *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian*

ian Conflict and a contributing editor to the WBAI radio show "Beyond the Pale: Radical Jewish Culture and Politics."

"It's a very dubious and dangerous collapse when 'Jew' and 'Israel' are conflated," Solomon said. "Anti-Semites do it a lot, and unfortunately, powers of the Israeli state do it as well."

And while being a Jew who forcefully speaks out against Israel's actions continues to be a minority position within the larger Jewish community, there is something of a generational shift among younger Jews away from attachment to Israel. According to a 2007 National Survey of American Jews, 54 percent of Jews younger than 35 are "comfortable with the idea of a Jewish state," compared to 81 percent of Jews older than 65, who grew up with the memory of the Holocaust fresh in their minds.

"The shift is going to happen slowly in the Jewish community, very slowly," said Ethan Heitner, 25, an activist with JATO and Adalah-NY: The Coalition for Justice in the Middle East. "There are starting to be cracks in the Zionist hegemonic viewpoint on things ... [Activism] has to continue, it has to keep growing, even when things get quiet."

Michael Letwin of U.S. Labor Against the War supports terminating U.S. aid to Israel as well as a nascent divestment and sanctions movement against Israel modeled on the one that confronted apartheid South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. He says he lost the presidency of his union, the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys UAW Local 2325, in the year after 9/11 due to his anti-Zionist views. Still he insists it is crucial for progressive Jews to speak out despite the possible consequences. "It's very hard to be an anti-Zionist in this country ... but there is space," he said. "And to the extent that we can open that space, and keep pushing the envelope, I think there's more opportunity sometimes than we think there is."

Letwin also stresses the importance of Jewish activists doing Palestine solidarity work engaging in open and constructive dialogue with Jews who believe in Zionism and support the state of Israel.

"There's no point in just speaking to people who are already convinced. We have to show our support for people who are already convinced ... but that's only the beginning, not the end," said Letwin. "We've got to talk to people that aren't already convinced, who don't know anything about it, or if they're Jewish and have totally distorted view."

Partnerships between Jews and Palestinians who protest Israel's occupation are also essential "to break this myth that there's no relationships available between these groups of people," said Flo Razowsky, the U.S. co-ordinator for the International Anti-Zionist Jewish Network, an organization that was a key player in the Israeli Consulate actions in California. Razowsky, 34, was once the president of a Zionist youth group. She says she had a "strong relationship to Israel."

"The simplest way to put it is to make an analogy between white-skinned people doing anti-racist work [with] Jews doing anti-Zionist work. ... [Zionism] is a deadly form of racism based on a very specific identity," Razowsky said.

PYRAMID SCHEME

Egypt's Rulers Bank on U.S.-Israel Alliance, Ignore Angry Populace

BY LAURA KASINOF

Demonstrations against the Egyptian government are a common sight in the crowded streets of downtown Cairo. They come complete with the obligatory line of riot police prepared to use violence against the protesters should things get too out of hand. From rising food prices to unjustly jailed political activists, Egyptians always seem to have reason to voice discontent against President Hosni Mubarak, who is going on his 28th year in office.

Shortly after Israel's military incursion into the Gaza Strip Dec. 27, thousands of Egyptians took to the streets to denounce the attack and their government's reaction to it. Despite the overwhelmingly anti-Israeli sentiments of the Egyptian populace, President Mubarak continued throughout the crisis to acquiesce to Israel's requests to keep the border between Gaza and Egypt closed. Mubarak also blamed Gaza's Hamas-led government for inciting the conflict.

In the aftermath of Gaza, questions linger about whether Mubarak's unwavering support for Israel will help stir enough discontent in Egyptian society for real action against the dictatorship — in particular, when Mubarak, 80, passes the presidency to his son, Gamal, which is expected to take place in 2011.

"It certainly undermines the government's popularity at home when it is seen to be standing aside when something like the Israeli operation in Gaza takes place," said

Michael Dunn, editor of *The Middle East Journal*, a publication of Washington-based Middle East Institute.

However, Dunn is skeptical whether anti-government feelings will lead to revolution in Egypt.

"Egypt has a stable society. It's not a terribly revolutionary place," Dunn said. "If something catalytic happened such as Mubarak's death, then the possibility of some kind of upheaval would be increased."

A CLOSE U.S. ALLY

Egypt receives \$2.1 billion per year in U.S. military and economic assistance, second only to Israel, and its leaders have much to gain by following Washington's cue and maintaining a conciliatory relationship with Israel. Egypt was the first Arab nation to establish peaceful ties with Israel in 1979, and the formal truce has been maintained ever since. Days before the battle in Gaza erupted, Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni traveled to Egypt and met with President Mubarak and other Egyptian leaders in Cairo.

"The Egyptian government completely and openly supported the Israeli invasion," said Stanford University history professor Joel Beinin who served as the director of Middle East Studies at the American University in Cairo from 2006 to 2008.

Diplomatically for Egypt this support equates to "continued good relations with the United States," Beinin explained.

Yet while there is peace between Egypt and Israel on paper, the relationship between Egypt and its Zionist neighbor is a major factor for Egyptians' rising discontent against their corrupt government — a discontent that is expressed both through liberal calls for democratic reform and through a rise in the popularity of religious fundamentalism.

Egypt's liberal political parties are fractious and poorly organized. However, supporting the Palestinian cause and anger at the Mubarak regime's submissiveness regarding the issue is a common thread knitting pro-democracy groups like al-Ghad Party and the New Wafd Party together.

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

On a surface level, the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, the outlawed yet tolerated fundamentalist political party in Egypt, is not all that different from its liberal counterparts when it comes to the Palestinian issue. However, the Muslim Brotherhood has a particular stake in supporting Hamas in the Gaza Strip because the Palestinian movement was originally an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

According to Beinin, the link between the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas is another reason why the Egyptian government not only tolerated, but welcomed Israel launching attacks against Hamas in Gaza.

Islamic fundamentalism continues to increase in Egypt, a country with 40 percent of its population living beneath the pov-

erty line. Liberal parties are seen as Western creations, while the Muslim Brotherhood is rooted in the religion of approximately 90 percent of Egypt's population, making them a much more appealing option for expressing dissent against the Mubarak dictatorship.

The more the Egyptian government is viewed as a puppet of the West, the greater the opportunity the Muslim Brotherhood has to grow.

Additionally, the Mubarak regime's dismal human rights record is another source of popular discontent. Emergency laws, which allow for the unlawful detaining of suspects and restriction of public gatherings, have been in place for more than 25 years. Members of the political opposition are tortured in prison while the gap between the wealthy and the poor continues to grow.

In spring 2008, while Egypt's economy was soaring and new foreign companies continued to open up shop along the Nile, deadly bread riots broke out in Cairo's poorest neighborhoods due to the rise of food prices worldwide.

If any further political upheaval, whether liberal or conservative, does occur in the near future, Egypt's relationship with Israel will be one of a myriad reasons Egyptians will have to rise up against their dictatorship.

Laura Kasinof worked as a Cairo-based freelance reporter for Daily News Egypt in 2008. You can read more of her articles at kasinofmedia.com.

Pro-Palestinian Groups Seek to Overcome Divisions

Continued from page 8

Right to Return Coalition and an organizer of several Gaza protests.

Cultural icons who have noted Arab and Palestinian matters have also helped. Bono spoke of the "Palestinian dream" before a half-million people at the Jan. 18 "We Are One" pre-inaugural concert on the Washington Mall. Comedian Jon Stewart of "The Daily Show" took aim at Israel's invasion of Gaza with satirical humor. During the conflict, opinion polls showed the U.S. public's support for Israel's offensive to be almost evenly divided, while a large majority of Americans still blamed Hamas for the hostilities.

"Though the community is far from being depicted in way we want, we're winning small battles along the way," said Linda Sarsour, noting a full-page open letter to Obama printed in the *New York Times* Jan. 21. The \$57,000 required to publish the letter was raised in New York.

The letter demanded an end to the blockade of Gaza; that Israel adhere to international law; that a lasting ceasefire be respected by both parties; and that the U.S. reevaluate delivering \$3 billion of annual aid to Israel. Several Arab-American and Muslim organizations, among them the American-Arab Anti Discrimination Committee, Islamic Circle of North America, and the Muslim Public Affairs Council, signed the letter.

"The community has sensed that America as a whole is willing to question what is happening in Palestine," said Samer Badawi, director of the United Palestinian Appeal. The nonprofit received more online donations last month than they did in a year, he said. "This speaks to people's unwillingness to let the government dictate to them how and who they support in Palestine."

A DIVIDED MOVEMENT

But the numerous groups supporting the Palestinian cause have remained disparate, lacking a single coherent message putting forth the concerns of the communities on a national level.

The various movements that participated in the Gaza protests, for example, advocated several messages. Some were in support of Hamas, while others were not;

some were in support of Obama, while others were openly skeptical of him. "Part of the problem is that the struggle itself is displaced," Badawi said. "We also lack a high profile voice for our cause, much like what Hanan Ashrawi's used to be."

Thus, the emergence of a single Arab or Muslim American movement that has been able to act as a national political lobby has been hampered. "This will always be a challenge for the Arab-Americans. We will always find groups that want to promote their own causes and that have different views on the key issues," el-Fawa said.

Regardless, local political efforts have emerged in New York and in Michigan, where Arab-Americans make up five percent of the population and own an estimated 3,000 businesses.

In Detroit, Arab-American leaders have made a point of registering members of the community, urging them to participate in politics. Key leaders, such as former Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.), have encouraged participation and helped train young people, said Dr. Ron Stockton of the University of Michigan. There are enough local Arab-American leaders who are critical of Israel, "that few people feel afraid to express their dissent" about U.S. policy.

In New York City, the Arab and Muslim communities organized themselves politically like never before during the recent 2008 race for an open seat in New York's



HOMESICK: Pro-Palestine demonstrators march in Midtown Manhattan Dec. 29.

PHOTO: JOEL COOK

Inside Gaza: The Stench of War

BY EVA BARTLETT
JANUARY 30

EZBET ABBED RABU, GAZA—The first house I visited in this community in northern Gaza was that of my dear friends, who I'd stayed with in the evenings before the Israeli land invasion began, with whom I had huddled in their basement as the random crashes of missiles pulverized the neighborhood. The ground floor room was the least affected: disheveled, piles of earth at bases of windows, mattresses turned over and items strewn.

Upstairs the first level apartment, complete disarray. Feces on the floor. Everything broken. Opened cans of Israeli army provisions. Bullet holes in walls. Stench. To the second floor, all of the extended sons and wives and children's rooms. More disarray, greater stench. This was the soldiers' main base judging by the boxes of food — prepackaged meals, noodles, tins of chocolate and plastic-wrapped sandwiches — and the clothing left behind by the occupiers. A pair of soldier's trousers lay in the bathtub, soiled with shit.

F. tells me: "The smell was terrible. The food was everywhere. Very disgusting smell. They put shit in the sinks. Our clothes were everywhere. The last time they invaded [March 2008], it was easy. They broke every-



Eva Bartlett has been in Gaza since November. This article is an excerpt from an article published on electronicintifada.net.

THE AFTERMATH: Twenty-one thousand homes in Gaza were damaged or destroyed by Israel's 22-day military offensive.

PHOTO: BARBARA RUBIN

13th Congressional District, which encompasses Staten Island and parts of Brooklyn. The seat had previously been held by Republican Vito Fossella for 12 years. "There is an understanding that these things have to begin at a local level there, and that there is no way to have a voice on the national level unless those local building blocks are in place," Khalidi said.

The community fundraised and ran a get-out-the-vote campaign in support of Democratic congressional candidate Michael McMahon, as well as Assemblywoman Janelle Hyer-Spencer (D-Stanton Island), with 130 members of the community knocking on 9,000 doors in Bay Ridge, Bensonhurst and Dyker Heights. "This was a breaking point in our community, finally people felt that their vote counted," Sarsour said. "The [elected officials] came to our mosques and to our community town halls to thank us, the Arab-American community. After so many failures we felt wow, we really have a base here."

But despite these ripples of organized activism, the impact still does not match the numbers. "Arab-Americans are still largely first generation," Khalidi said. "They are largely un-assimilated and unaware of how the United States functions and of how to exercise influence in this society."

And further harming the matter is the mainstream media, which has ignored the messages put forth by the communities.

"The same blatant bias that covers the conflict characterizes the depiction of protests in support of Palestine and against Israel's actions. They are systematically under-reported. In fact, most Americans did not have the slightest notion that there were unprecedented protests across the U.S.," Khalidi said.

And while more people are speaking out, "Mainstream media is not fostering an open conversation of what is really happening," said Omar Qureshi, a New York-based medical doctor and political activist. "It needs to show that there is a different side to Muslims and Arabs, other than the traditional views. People also only speak out when they are secure about their jobs. There is still that fear there."

The only way to conquer these media biases and remaining challenges for the Arab-American community appears to be to organize on the national level, utilizing resources while creating a coherent set of demands.

"We need a real concerted effort with real resources behind it, not just volunteers sending out press releases," said Yasmin Hamidi of the Arab American Professionals of New York.

Regardless, the community has come far. "We are finally approaching a point where we have the capacity to form a political movement that has a voice," Baddawi said.



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Supporting Nonviolent Social Change Since 1974

Bolivia Celebrates New Constitution

BY BEN DANGL

LA PAZ, Bolivia—After Bolivia's new constitution was passed in a national referendum Jan. 25, thousands gathered in the capital of La Paz to celebrate. Standing on the balcony of the presidential palace, President Evo Morales addressed a raucous crowd: "Here begins a new Bolivia. Here we begin to reach true equality."

The constitution, which was written in a constituent assembly that first convened in August 2006, grants unprecedented rights to Bolivia's indigenous majority, establishes broader access to basic services, education and healthcare, and expands the role of the state in the management of natural resources and the economy.

The referendum was approved with about 61 percent of the vote. It received overwhelming support in Bolivia's predominantly indigenous western highlands while four lowland provinces in the more affluent eastern part of the country voted against the new constitution.

When the news spread throughout La Paz that the constitution had been approved in the referendum, fireworks, cheers and horns sounded off sporadically. By 8:30 p.m., thousands had already gathered in the Plaza Murillo. The crowd cheered, "Evo! Evo! Evo!" until Morales, Vice President Alvaro

Garcia Linera and other leading figures in the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) government, crowded out onto the balcony of the presidential palace.

"I would like to take this opportunity to recognize all of the brothers and sisters of Bolivia, all of the compañeros and compañeras, all of the citizens that through their vote, through their democratic participation, decided to refound Bolivia," Morales said. "From 2005 to 2009 we have gone from triumph to triumph, while the neo-liberals, the traitors have been constantly broken down thanks to the consciousness of the Bolivian people."

He shook his fist in the air. The applause died down. "And I want you to know something, the colonial state ends here. Internal colonialism and external colonialism ends here. Sisters and brothers, neoliberalism ends here too."

At various points in the speech, Morales and others on the balcony held up copies of the new constitution. Morales continued, "And now, thanks to the consciousness of the Bolivian people, the natural resources are recuperated for life, and no government, no new president can ... give our natural resources away to transnational companies."

A WEAKENED RIGHT

Though news reports and analysts have sug-

gested that the passage of the new constitution will exacerbate divisions in the country, some of the political tension may be directed into the electoral realm as general elections are now scheduled to take place in December of this year. In addition, the constitution's passage is another sign of the weakness of the Bolivian right, and their lack of a clear political agenda and mandate to confront the MAS's popularity. The recent passage of the constitution is likely to divide and further debilitate the right.

Even Manfred Reyes Villa, an opponent of Morales and ex-governor of Cochabamba, told *The Washington Post* that, "Today, there is not a serious opposition in the country." When the right-wing led violence in the department of Pando in September 2008 left some 20 people dead and many others wounded, the right lost much of its legitimacy and support. "With Pando, the regional opposition just collapsed," George Gray Molina, an ex-United Nations official in Bolivia, and a current research fellow at Oxford University, told Partlow. "I think they lost authority and legitimacy even among their own grassroots."

CELEBRATIONS

Fireworks shot off at the end of Morales' speech in the Plaza Murillo, sending scared pigeons flying. Live folk music played on

stage as the crowd danced and the TV crews packed up and left. The wind blew around giant balloon figures of hands the colors of the Bolivian flag holding the new constitution.

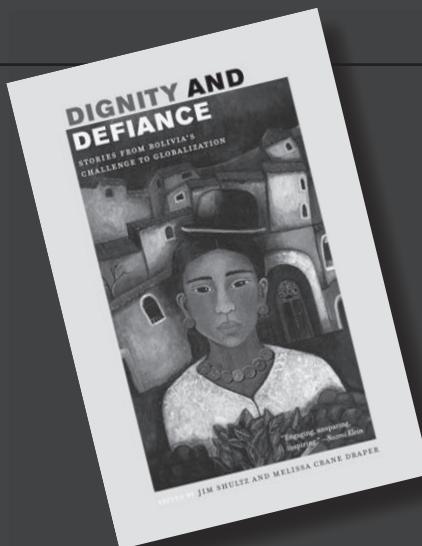
As the night wore on, more people began dancing to the bands in the street than to those on the stage. At midnight, when the police asked the thousands gathered to leave the plaza, the crowd took off marching down the street, taking the fiesta to central La Paz, cheering nearly every Latin American revolutionary cheer, pounding drums and sharing beer. After marching down a number of blocks on the empty streets, the crowd hunkered down for a street party at the base of a statue of the Latin American liberator, Simón Bolívar.

Oscar Rocabobo, a Bolivian sociologist working on his Master's degree in La Paz, was elated about the victory in the referendum. "The passage of this constitution is like the cherry on top of the ice cream, the culmination of many years of struggle."

This article originally appeared online at, upsidedownworld.org.

Globalization on the Ground: WHAT BOLIVIA TEACHES US

Book Presentation and Discussion



Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization
with co-editors Jim Shultz and Melissa Draper, and collaborator Roberto Fernández Terán

FEBRUARY 17 • 6:00 PM

The New School, 66 W. 12th St., Room 510, New York
Sponsored by The New School Graduate Program in International Affairs and the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA)

democracyctr.org/book

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Blocking the 'Washington Consensus'

DAVID HOLLOWBACH



Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization
EDITED BY JIM SHULTZ AND MELISSA CRANE DRAPER
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2009

Ten years ago, it would have been unthinkable that in 2009 Bolivia would approve a constitution rejecting neoliberal policies and recognizing indigenous rights. Drawing on a decade of advocacy, research and reporting from Bolivia, the Democracy Center looks for lessons from the struggle in *Dignity and Defiance: Stories from Bolivia's Challenge to Globalization*. Editors Jim Shultz and Melissa Crane Draper weave together eyewitness accounts and interviews framed by insightful analysis.

The book presents a range of perspectives within the globalization debate, from Bolivian officials on the payroll of the U.S.-based Inter-American Development Bank, to Doña Porfira, one of the countless Bolivians whose livelihood was washed away during the massive Enron and Shell oil spill of 2000. The book documents the enormous gap between the reality on the ground and the theoretical benefits of policies dictated by the "Washington Consensus," under which funds are loaned to developing nations on the condition they privatize state industries and cut public spending.

Bolivia has the greatest number of indigenous people in South America and is among the continent's poorest nations. This poverty can be traced back to the extraction of vast amounts of silver

from "Cerro Rico" by the Spanish, which financed its empire for the next two centuries, but left Bolivia deeply impoverished. Chronic poverty translated into chronic political instability and dependence on foreign aid. Starting in the 1980s, the economic policies of the "Washington Consensus" were leveraged upon Bolivia in return for desperately needed financial aid. This succeeded in enriching the elite few, while the vast majority suffered.

Recently, Bolivians have had increasing success rejecting these policies. During the Water Revolt of 2000, Bechtel took control of Cochabamba's water supply and distribution and jacked up the price. In response, residents organized, took to the streets and drove Bechtel out of the city. Shultz was awarded for his reporting in Cochabamba by Project Censored. Ever since, Bolivia has found itself at the forefront of opposition to neoliberalism, and the Democracy Center has been on the ground to report on events and to organize campaigns in solidarity.

When Bechtel sued Bolivia for \$50 million dollars for the loss of the water contract in 2004, international solidarity movements pressured the company to settle for a five-cent symbolic payment. Bolivian social movements and indigenous groups have also had increasing success, for the first time propelling one of their own, Evo Morales, to the presidency in

2005. With this victory Bolivians firmly rejected the neoliberal policies that perpetuate poverty. The editors point out that while Morales has begun directing profits from the sale of Bolivia's natural resources towards the indigenous majority, an abundance of resources alone is not enough to guarantee wealth. Bolivia's challenge is to create a sustainable model of resource extraction and growth.

To further discuss Bolivia's progress and challenges, the *Independent's* Jaisal Noor caught up with Jim Shultz.

JAISAL NOOR: As much as your book deals with the successes of the anti-corporate globalization movement, it doesn't gloss over its shortcomings. Could you share some of your insights on the future of the struggle in Bolivia?

JIM SHULTZ: It's a sad fact that nine years after the Water Revolt, which was a global inspiration, the public water company's situation here in Cochabamba is still miserable — it's still inefficient, it's still corrupt, it's still not doing the job. Part of the lesson here is if we don't follow up these great victories in the street with nuts-and-bolts work of creating the alternative that actually delivers the goods, then the victory ends up being hollow. And sooner or later, if public control of these resources doesn't work, the people in places like Bolivia are going to begin to

turn around and say, "Gosh, we really should have corporations doing this." So as a movement for social justice we have to pay much more careful attention to building these public systems that can deliver the goods.

JN: What do you think the future holds for U.S.-Latin American relations?

JS: Oddly enough, the one upside to the "global war on terror" is that the Bush Administration didn't pay any attention to Latin America while an important pendulum swung with the election of a whole class of left-of-center national governments. And they are a very united force. After the violence in Bolivia in September and October [2008], the South American presidents not the United States intervened.

The way we make sure a difference happens is by linking citizens with citizens, people with people in the United States and Latin America. Diplomatic relationships between the United States and its neighbors ought to be determined by the people of the United States and those neighbors as opposed to just diplomatic experts. That's what we are trying to build and that's what I think we're going to see in the next 10 years.

—JAISAL NOOR

For the full interview with Jim Shultz, visit indypendent.org

A Real War with A Fictitious Context

War Without End: The Iraq War in Context
BY MICHAEL SCHWARTZ
HAYMARKET BOOKS, 2008

Journalist and sociology professor Michael Schwartz posits a simple explanation for the U.S.-led war against Iraq: a desire to "strip economic and political power from key Middle Eastern nations, then extracting oil at a pace far faster than the countries themselves had deemed judicious."

Weapons of mass destruction? Of course not. And everyone — from the Bush administration to Iraq War coalition supporters — knew that this alleged bogeyman was a fictional construct.

Instead, Schwartz writes, the U.S.-led invasion harkened back to the heyday of imperialist bluster, a time when American strength easily trampled international obstacles.

"For example," Schwartz explains, "the U.S. invasion of Iraq, designed to open up the Iraqi oil fields to foreign investment, was entirely consistent with the long legacy of military and economic intervention around the world. ...



discontinue the aerial spraying of fields of date palms and growers were ordered to hire private anti-pest companies themselves. Unfortunately, most farmers lacked the financial wherewithal to do this; as a result, the crops became infested

and production shrank precipitously, leaving agronomists and their families destitute.

This, Schwartz writes, forced families off lands their ancestors had tilled for generations. The parallel closing of state-sponsored factories led to "urban slumification."

Shi'a and Sunni, now crowded into miserably inadequate quarters, in cities with too little water, erratic electricity, food shortages, rampant unemployment, scant healthcare, and closed schools responded by fighting not only the invading armies, but each other. Those who could leave Iraq did so, with nearly two million pouring into Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Syria and Europe to escape a tidal wave of suffering.

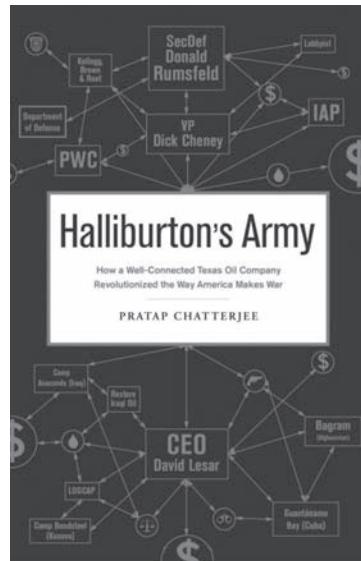
Those who stayed — the poorest, least educated and most religiously conservative — have fought like lions to protect their holdings. "In the mind of the war's planners," Schwartz writes, "the invasion was sure to yield a quick

victory, to be followed by the creation of a client state that would house crucial, enduring U.S. military bases from which Washington would project power throughout the Greater Middle East."

Obviously that hasn't happened. Protests by organized labor, the unemployed and Muslim militias have stymied U.S. plans, offering dogged resistance, first to Coalition occupiers, and later to the Iraqi puppets installed by the United States and its allies. What's more, despite Bush's best efforts, Iraq and Iran are not at each other's throats and indigenous military formations continue to develop.

War Without End paints a detailed picture of the fighting, focusing both on the lunacy of U.S. foreign policy and the resultant despair these policies have caused. It's grim but powerful reading. Although I wanted a fuller explanation of the roots of Shi'a/Sunni conflict, *War Without End* is a brilliant and readable introduction to the destruction wrought by America's lust for oil and an insightful look at 21st century colonialism.

—ELEANOR J. BADER



Outsourcing Our Wars

Halliburton's Army: How a Well-Connected Texas Oil Company Revolutionized the Way America Makes War
By PRATAP CHATTERJEE
NATION BOOKS, 2009

In 2004, antiwar activists pushed bright red booklets titled "Houston We Have a Problem" under the doors of hotel rooms where Halliburton shareholders rested before the company's annual meeting. The booklets were alternative annual reports that detailed how Halliburton and its then subsidiary, KBR, overcharged taxpayers for services in Iraq, was under investigation for corruption and had used political connections to win no-bid and cost-plus contracts. Those contracts now total more than \$30 billion.

The report's author, Pratap Chatterjee of Corpwatch, a corporate watch-dog group, compiles years of reporting on Halliburton/KBR's corporate malfeasance in *Halliburton's Army: How a Well-Connected Texas Oil Company Revolutionized the Way America Makes War*. More than a laundry list of wrongdoings, the book shows how the symbol of a failed Iraq reconstruction effort achieved so little with so much money. As we move on from the Bush administration, this book helps to understand what really happened.

Halliburton subsidiary KBR won the bulk of contracts in Iraq before it was spun off in 2007. The Texas-based company began building military bases during the Vietnam War, when President Lyndon B. Johnson favored it in exchange for hefty campaign donations. KBR co-founder George Brown claimed LBJ described the deals as a "joint venture," in which, "I'm going to take care of the politics and you're going to take care of the business side of it."

By 2003, Halliburton/KBR had a seat at the table when Pentagon officials planned the invasion of Iraq.

Oscar Nominations and a Curious Case of Politics

Once upon a time (and a heady and exhilarating time it was), ferment bubbled up through the nation, people declared that business would no longer continue as usual and movements coined slogans that felt like eternal truths. They said, "We shall overcome!" "We are everywhere!" "The personal is political!"

This year's Academy Award nominations are a tribute to the movie industry's ability to trivialize such truths. The majority of the nominations assert firmly that the political is personal, not vice versa.

Consider the five films nominated for Best Picture:

Two, *Frost/Nixon* and *Milk* are based on significant events in U.S. history. *Milk*, the story of murdered gay San Francisco politician Harvey Milk, may be on its face the most political of the Oscar nominees, but only in the narrowest sense of the word. Charting Milk's rise to elected office in the late 1970s during the gay liberation movement, despite furious opposition from what was beginning to coalesce as the Christian Right, *Milk* fails to set the gay movement in the context of the era's other liberation movements and the resistance to them. It's a failure that robs the film of the broader significance it might have had.

Two of the other Best Picture nominees go much further in their reductionism. *The Reader*, directed by Stephen Daldry, tells the story of a passionate affair between a 36-year-old German woman with a secret or two (Kate Winslet) and a teenage boy (David Kross). Some years later, as a law student, the youth attends a war-crimes trial of some former

guards at the death camps, one of whom turns out to be his ex-lover. It seems that a connection is intended between the affair — and the youth's family's obliviousness to the turbulence in his life — and questions of collective German guilt and innocence. The connection, however, escaped this reviewer entirely. So, for that matter, did the motivations of most of the characters in the movie. What was lost in particular was the rationale for the central plot, the woman's attraction to the not-very-appealing youth.

Perhaps the most curious case of depoliticization is *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, directed by David Fincher. With its account of an unusual child who grows up to experience the great events of his time but remains untouched by them, it has reminded many of 1995's Best Picture, *Forrest Gump*. Like *Gump*, *Button* also features a story of a protagonist's lifelong love for a beautiful but elusive woman. Based on an F. Scott Fitzgerald tale of an infant born old who grows younger over time, *Button* adds

done off the battlefield.

All of the contracts were won with minimal lobbying since Halliburton's ex-CEO, Dick Cheney, was Vice President. Even when accusations of overcharging surfaced in 2004, Chatterjee notes the company's annual lobbying budget was just \$300,000.

Throughout the invasion and occupation, Chatterjee spoke to whistleblowers within the Pentagon and Halliburton who were upset about the waste and corruption they observed. They described how the company instructed them to purchase goods from favored suppliers even when they had lower bids from others. Chatterjee complements their stories by combing through reports from the General Accounting

Office. In one, he found that a \$587 million contract had been approved in 10 minutes based on six pages of documentation.

Chatterjee had to do his own reporting on how people brought in from other countries, called "third country nationals," were abused by subcontractors Halliburton hired to do the bulk of work outlined in these contracts. He traveled to bases in Iraq and visited workers from the Philippines and South Asia who did construction and staffed the cafeterias. One worker said, "We ate when the Americans had leftovers from their meals. If not, we didn't eat at all."

Chatterjee also provides numerous examples of KBR's shoddy work, both on military bases and

TIM DURNING



the Indian version of "Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?" In this India, the poverty and its concomitants are facts of life, not consequences of history — indeed, the only Indian history the movie acknowledges is the construction of the Taj Mahal.

As always, there were better — and more deeply political — movies that never made it to the top of the Oscar heap. *Doubt*, director-playwright John Patrick Shanley's provocative and gripping investigation into pedophilia and the clergy, earned four acting nominations

but didn't get a Best-Picture nod. *Secrets of the Grain*, the poignant, tender story of Tunisian immigrants in France by Franco-Tunisian director Abdel Kechiche, was made in 2007 but shown in the United States in 2008, making it ineligible for Best Foreign Film.

Also shut out of the Oscar race were two additional films more satisfying than all the nominees put together: *Gran Torino*, Clint Eastwood's moving reversal of the violence-makes-the-man myth that made him famous, and *Miracle at St. Anna*, Spike Lee's ghost story about an all Black U.S. battalion fighting in Italy during World War II. I guess we shouldn't be surprised, given that no movie about African-Americans has ever won the Best Picture award, nor has any Spike Lee movie ever been nominated. There was, however, an earlier Best Picture about life in India — *Gandhi* won in 1983.

The envelopes will be opened Feb. 22.

—JUDITH MAHONEY PASTERNAK

on Iraq reconstruction efforts. These problems may get more scrutiny now that Bush is gone. In January, Democratic Senators Robert Casey and Byron Dorgan argued a soldier's electrocution death in Iraq due to faulty wiring was a "negligent homicide" by KBR. Still, Halliburton continues to suck billions from the federal teat. If we are to cut them off, we must first take stock of what they have (or have not) done, and Chatterjee's book is the perfect guide.

—RENEE FELTZ

Pratap Chatterjee will discuss his new book Feb. 9, 7 p.m. at the Brecht Forum. 451 West Street. For more info, brechtforum.org.

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